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Oration

by

Samuel A. Allen

July 4, 1806

on

American

Independence

30th Anniversary



MR. ALLEN'S

O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED JULY 4, 1806.

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AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

PETERSHAM,

JULY 4, 1806,

AT THE

ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

— ❁ —
BY SAMUEL C. ALLEN.
— ❁ —

POST, UBI CONTAGIO, QUASI PESTILENTIA, INVASIT ; CIVITAS
IMMUTATA, IMPERIUM, EX JUSTISSIMO ATQUE OPTIMO, CRU-
DELE INTOLERANDUMQUE FACTUM. SALLUST.

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P 5
1806

IN behalf of the Committee of Arrangements for celebrating the Anniversary of American Independence in the town of Petersham, we return their most cordial thanks to SAMUEL C. ALLEN, Esquire, for the excellent Oration delivered this day, and request him to furnish a copy for publication.

PETERSHAM, }
JULY 4, 1806. }

DANIEL BIGELOW,
JOHN CHANDLER,
NATHL. MACCARTY.

NEW SALEM, *August 1st*, 1806.

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE, at length, agreeable to your polite request, concluded to furnish a copy of my Oration for the press. In yielding this imperfect performance to the call of my fellow citizens who heard it, I have been influenced by the hope, that it might contribute, in some small degree, to preserve the true knowledge of the revolution, and to maintain the genuine spirit by which it was effected. At a time, when the good old principles of 1776 are misrepresented, and doctrines, unknown to the patriots of that proud period, are propagated with industry and zeal, when the national spirit is paralysed, and the genius of American Liberty is held in bondage, every effort, however feeble it may be, to vindicate truth, to strip falsehood of its deceptive disguise, and to raise the publick mind to its just elevation, is not altogether destitute of merit. The copy is at your disposal. To you, who know the circumstances in which the original was written, apologies are unnecessary; with the publick they can be of no avail.

With great respect, I am, gentlemen,
your humble servant.

SAMUEL C. ALLEN

DANIEL BIGELOW,
JOHN CHANDLER, and
NATHL. MACCARTY, Esquire

AN
O R A T I O N.

NATIONS, like the individuals who compose them, have their progress and decline. The causes, which contribute to prolong their existence, or accelerate their fall, may arise from external influence or violence, as well as from defects, in the forms of the constitution, and from a degeneracy of the national spirit.

The legitimate design of all government is to secure men in the enjoyment of their natural rights. For this purpose, however, different nations have adopted different political constitutions, as best accorded with the genius and manners of the people. The form of government, therefore, in every nation is rather the result of public sentiment, than the cause which produces it. And, though a constitution defining the different powers of the government, may favour the preservation of civil liberty ; yet, when its sacred barriers are trampled under foot, who shall avenge the violated instrument, and vindicate the rights of the people ? Unless the same spirit, which gave existence to a free government, can be kept alive in the people, however the forms of the

constitution may be preserved, it will degenerate into a system of practical tyranny. The Romans were amused with the contemptible farce of electing their consuls, and fancied them the successors of Brutus and of Scipio, when these officers had lost all authority in the Commonwealth, and were exhibited, by a military despot, as mere puppets to flatter the prejudices of the vulgar, and to varnish the crimes of an oppressive and wicked administration.

Though we cannot too highly appreciate our republican constitutions of government, purchased, as they were, by the lives of so many brave men, and comprising, as they do, the wisdom of preceding ages ; yet, we are not to repose entire confidence in them for the security of our rights. The preservation of civil liberty depends more on publick sentiment, on national spirit and manners, than, on the particular form of government. The ancient republicks did not derive their origin from the projects of statesmen, or the theories of philosophers. They arose from the instincts and sentiments of men, and received their form from the circumstances in which the people were placed. And it is a curious fact, that the ancients, by the mere dictate of natural feeling, and the moderns, by a process of reasoning, should arrive at the same results. Locke and Sydney have demonstrated truths in the science of government, which dictated those ardent emotions and strong sentiments, by which the best of the Romans were animated and impelled to deeds of patriotism.

In the first age of that Commonwealth, the love of country absorbed every inferiour passion ; and jus-

tice and moderation prevailed, by the strength of natural sentiment, without the artificial constraint of the laws. But, when Rome had become rich by industry, and proud by conquest, ambition and avarice sprang up in the minds of the people ; a corruption of manners ensued ; and the republick sunk under the accumulated burden of its own vices.

In every country, and under every form of government, the publick sentiment, the national spirit must be maintained in its vigour, or the rights of the people cannot be preserved.

The revolution, which liberated the American people from the dominion of England, is an astonishing instance of the energy of national spirit. This supplied the means of defence. This produced order without arrangement, and union without concert.

But what were the immediate causes, which led to this great event ? What were the efficient principles, which produced it ?

After the peace of seventeen hundred sixty three, the English ministry began to manifest a design, not only to draw a revenue from the colonies, under the pretence of defraying the expenses of the war ; but to reduce them to a more immediate dependence on the crown. The measures of the British parliament gave great and just alarm to the people. Descended from the English nation, they retained an affection for the land of their fathers, and were, from principle, attached to their lawful sovereign. They considered themselves, as free-born subjects of the English government, and claim-

ed the rights and privileges, secured to them by the British constitution. When the parliament, therefore, assumed the right to impose taxes, and, in all cases, to bind the colonies by their laws, they deemed this act, as the commencement of a system of measures, calculated to degrade them from the rank of freemen, and to reduce them to the condition of slaves and vassals. They were born free, and they determined not to survive the loss of their liberty. The national spirit, like the electric fluid, diffused itself through the continent. The people from New-hampshire to Georgia, as if impelled by one principle, flew to arms conscious of the injuries they suffered, and relying on the justice of Providence for success.

It is true, this is not the light, in which many of the writers and declaimers of the present day, who profess to admire the revolution, affect to consider it.

They would represent the American patriots, as a political sect, who had embraced *a new doctrine*, and, like the followers of Mahomet, had taken arms for the propagation of their principles. They would exhibit their virtuous efforts, for the emancipation of their own country ; as the commencement of a system of warfare, against a monarchical form of government in every nation. They would compare the temperate spirit of our revolution, to that mad phrensy, which, under the pretext of establishing liberty, violated the sacred rights of humanity, and spread devastation and misery, through the fairest portion of Europe.

However, men of superficial minds might be flattered with the French revolution in its outset ; yet the enormities, which have marked its progress, and the tyranny, in which it has issued, have proved its hostility to social order and happiness. Yet, when this revolution was in vogue, many of the people of this country, had formed extravagant expectations of the advantages, which would arise from the prevalence of its principles. As though doctrines could be taught by the sword, and men could be conquered to freedom ; they vainly imagined, that the fate of republican liberty through the world, was suspended from the issue of this bloody conflict. With enthusiastick expectation and awful solicitude, they looked to the termination of the dreadful struggle, as the period of relief and of rest to weary and oppressed humanity. The atrocities, which distinguished its triumphs, they considered the involuntary “ spasms of “infuriated man, seeking, through blood and slaughter, his long-lost liberty.” Possessing a strong sympathy with the jacobin sect, a party, in this country, had organized itself, for the purpose of overawing the executive, and compelling the administration to join that regicide faction, and to attach itself to the bloody destinies of France. Happy for the people, the political discernment of Adams, and the manly decision of Washington, arrested the progress of this dangerous enthusiasm, and saved the country from the calamities and misery, which befel the nations of Europe. But the patriots of our revolution did not dream of a millenium ; but they felt and acted like

men. They did not declaim against kings, for the purpose of becoming tyrants, under another name ; but they loved their country ; they were acquainted with its political rights ; and they had determined to risk their lives and fortunes, in their defence. When they took up arms, they claimed no privileges, but such as were secured to them by the British constitution, by charter, and immemorial usage.

This is evinced by the declaration of their representatives on the sixth of July, 1775.

In this, they complain “ of statutes for altering
 “ fundamentally the form of government, established
 “ by charter, and secured by acts of the legislature,
 “ solemnly confirmed by the crown. And why,”
 say they, “ should we enumerate our injuries in de-
 “ tail? By one statute it is declared, that parliament can,
 of right, make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever.
 “ What is to defend us against so enormous, so un-
 “ limited a power ? not a single man of those, who
 “ assume it is chosen by us, or is subject to our con-
 “ troul or influence. But, on the contrary, they are
 “ all of them exempt from the operation of such laws,
 “ and an American revenue, if not diverted from the
 “ ostensible purposes for which it is raised, would
 “ actually lighten their own burdens, in proportion
 “ as they increase ours. We saw the misery to
 “ which such despotism would reduce us. We, for
 “ ten years, incessantly and ineffectually beseeched
 “ the throne as supplicants : we reasoned, we remon-
 “ strated in the most mild and decent language. Ad-
 “ ministration, sensible that we should regard these

“oppressive measures as freemen ought to do, sent
 “over fleets and armies to enforce them. The indig-
 “nation of the American people was roused, it is
 “true, but it was the indignation of a virtuous, loyal
 “and affectionate people.”

Such men were incapable of treason. They resisted the usurpations of the British government, but not the constitutional exercise of its powers.

The same idea of the principles of the revolution, is contained in the speech, which General Washington made to the army, when he caused the declaration of Independence to be proclaimed before them. These are his remarkable words. “It behooves us
 “to adopt such counsels, as, under the smiles of a
 “gracious and all-kind Providence, will be most
 “likely to promote our happiness. I trust, these de-
 “cisive measures are calculated for that end, and
 “will secure us that freedom and those privileges,
 “which have been, and are, refused to us, contrary
 “to the voice of nature, and the British Consti-
 “tution.”

But when hostilities had commenced, there was no medium betwixt an unlimited submission to the British government, and a total dissolution of all political connexion with it. Dreadful as was the alternative, Americans did not hesitate. They resolved to hazard their existence, rather than abandon their rights. In a long and bloody war, when its external means were exhausted, the country derived new resources from the courage and fortitude of the people. *They* were not to be dismayed by dangers, or sub-

duced by sufferings. Compelled to resort to the sword, they disdained a compromise.

“ The issue of this contest was glorious ; could it be otherwise, when its destinies were committed “ to” Washington.

The different colonies, having asserted their independence, proceeded to establish for themselves, constitutions of government. These, however, were adapted to the ancient usages of country ; and few alterations were introduced into the forms, either of the publick administration, or the judicial proceedings.

But the old Confederation, under which the war had been conducted, was found insufficient for the purposes of the union ; after a sense of common danger had deserted its members. The American people had now arrived at an alarming crisis in their affairs. A spirit of discontent pervaded every part of the country ; a rebellion had actually broken out in this Commonwealth, and there seemed to be no power in the state to remedy, or repress the disorders.

A plan for a national government was projected ; a constitution was framed, and adopted by the people.

By this constitution, while the states retained their sovereignty, the more effectually to secure the liberties of the people, they united in a general government, “ in order to form a more perfect union and to provide for the common defence.” “ If a Republick be small,” says the incomparable Montesquieu, “ it is destroyed by a foreign force ; if it be large, it “ is ruined by an internal imperfection.” The United States, therefore, by adopting a Federal constitution,

and, at the same time, retaining their individual sovereignty, have combined the internal advantages of a republican, with the external force of a monarchical government. This is, perhaps, the only way, in which the liberties of the people, and the safety of the state, can both be preserved. It is, however, no modern invention. It was known to the ancients, and contributed to prolong the existence of the Grecian states. Holland and Switzerland are modern instances of it ; and they flourished, till the French revolution had diffused its pestilence among the people, and palsied the national spirit.

If, therefore, every form of political constitution has been found insufficient to preserve its own existence, we are forbid to entertain the expectation, though we might indulge the patriotick wish, that ours will be perpetual. Every species of governments has its imperfections, and, in the order of Providence, there are causes of destruction, allotted to political establishments as well as to physical beings. But, besides the external violence by which all government may alike be subverted, there are secret and invisible causes, resulting from their peculiar structure, which may gradually undermine their existence. But, as they differ in the principles by which they are made to act, as well as in the form in which they are constituted, they are liable to different disorders, arising from the various passions, which agitate and impel the human mind.

In Republicks, the principle of the government must be preserved, or the freedom of the constitu-

tion will prove an inlet to actual tyranny. In a disordered state of the commonwealth, the people, wearied with the contentions of party, and vexed with the oppressions of power, not subject to the restraints of law, will resort to a master, for the protection, which the government is unable to give. This must necessarily take place, when the mild restraints of reason, and the power of moral suasion, shall loose their influence on the publick mind. The principle of a free government being once corrupted, the rights of the people can find no sanctuary in the forms of the constitution.

These are not mere speculative opinions ; but they involve the interests of our native country, the safety of our own firesides, and the rights of posterity.

Americans, there is no piety in the fraud, which would conceal from you the real state of your affairs, and amuse you with fair speeches, when your commerce is left without protection, and your citizens are insulted and murdered in the very entrance of your harbours. Where are the resources of the country ? Are they squandered in the purchase of new territory, or yielded to the demands of the Gallic chief ? Where is the nation's spirit ? Where are the sons of those men, who fought on the heights of Charlestown, and the plains of Monmouth ? Are they prepared to truckle to a foreign state, and drawl out a degraded existence ? Where is the courageous wisdom ; where is the manly decision, the independent spirit, which distinguished the early counsels of the general government ? Remember the times of Genet. Who saved the country from joining in a

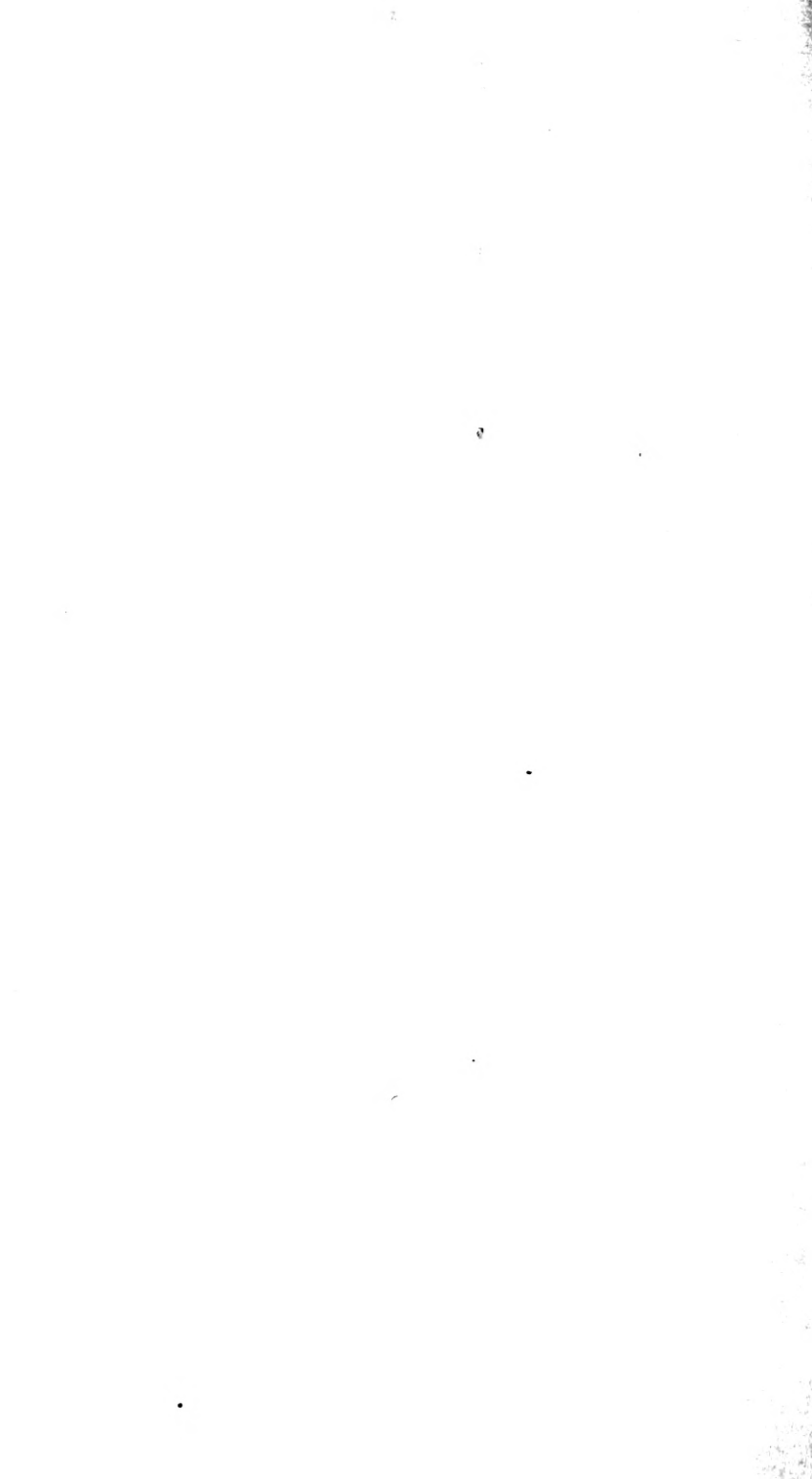
Jacobin war, and rescued the people from the delirium of French phrensy? Why are the friends and companions of Washington, driven from the national counsels? Where is the sage of Quincy, the early and constant assertor of American Independence?

They might have continued in power, if they would have prostrated the rights and dignity of the nation. But they could not be seduced by intrigue, or overborne by insolence. When the whole hemisphere was covered with blackness, and the elements of the political world were in awful commotion, they withstood the tempest, and weathered out the storm.

The French government was mortified and chagrined by the defeat of its base and nefarious projects. It is not in the nature of such counsels, however, to abandon their object. When they found the American government could not be corrupted, they addressed themselves to the people, for the purpose of destroying their confidence, in the wisdom and rectitude of its measures. Ambitious men were not wanting to enlist in the work of revolution, and to aid their design of effecting a change in the administration.

Unfortunate for the cause of civil liberty, the people are liable to be deceived. But, however, they may for a time, mistake the true interests of the country, and suffer a suspension of the national spirit; yet, they will awake from their slumbers, they will look back to the days of Washington; the fire of the revolution will kindle in their breasts; and the national character will emerge from the cloud, which obscures its lustre.





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